

*Washington, DC* - Rep. John Hall (NY-19) chaired a hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Assistance today as part of his ongoing effort to address the backlog of disability claims at the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Rep. Hall called the hearing to better understand the relationship between the quality and accuracy of the claims process, and how the VA evaluates its employees' work performance. Witnesses from several prominent national veterans organizations testified that the VA has sacrificed the accuracy of the system in trying to rush claims through. As a result, veterans are often left to choose between accepting an unfair ruling or the prospect of undergoing a grueling, multi-year appeals process.

A report by the VA Office of Inspector General in March found that nearly 25 percent of claims were decided incorrectly, and nearly 60 percent of claims appealed by veterans are reversed or remanded to the VA for further work.

“In its attempts to address its million-plus claims backlog, the VA is making too many mistakes that deny healthcare and benefits to veterans,” said Rep. Hall. “The VA has set up a system where employees of the Veterans Benefit Administration need to ‘push paper’ and are not rewarded for taking the needed time to fully investigate each claim. The system is broken.”

In 2008, legislation authored by Rep. Hall, PL 110-389, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008, required the VA to conduct a study on how it measures employee productivity and quality. The findings were due to Congress last October, but the VA has yet to file a report.

“It is unacceptable that the VA is nearly 5 months late in producing this report,” said Rep. Hall. “It’s clear that the system is broken and the VA needs to stop wasting time and to get to work fixing it.”

Despite the fact that Congress has approved funds to hire an additional 7,000 new claims processors in the past 4 years, the claims backlog has nearly doubled to 1.1 million pending claims. These include many appeals of bad claims decisions, and repeat claims filed by veterans who were wrongfully denied earlier claims. “We cannot keep throwing bodies into a broken system. We owe it to our veterans to make sure their claims are decided accurately the first time they are reviewed,” Rep. Hall said.